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THE JARRELL/ CEDAR PARK AND PEDERNALES VALLEY TORNADOES

Summary of WEATHER EVENT of MAY 27, 1997

In the afternoon of Tuesday, May 27, 1997, very violent thunderstorms erupted over Central and South Central Texas. Extremely unstable conditions were in place aloft as a weather system moved over Texas from the west. At the surface, a cool front moving south was intersected by an outflow boundary, moving southwest and also by warm and humid southerly winds from the south and southeast. Dew points in the warm and humid air were in the mid to upper 70s.

A tragic tornado of unimaginable proportions hit Jarrell, in northern Williamson county, with over 261 mph winds around 342 pm, causing extensive damage and 27 deaths. A Tornado Warning had been issued at 330 pm warning the residents in Jarrell of the impending danger. More than 300 head of cattle were also killed as the twister moved through. The tornado passed just to the west of downtown Jarrell striking the Double Creek subdivision where most of the lives were lost. The twister debarked trees, pulled the grass from the ground and carried dozens of vehicles more than one half mile away. There was nothing left in the tornadoes wake as it moved south-southeast.

Tornado reports also came from Leander in Williamson County around 4 pm. In Cedar Park, just south of Leander, an Albertson's grocery store was destroyed. A heroic store manager saved countless lives by telling people to get into a steel meat locker. Other residents in the nearby Buttercup subdivision sought shelter indoors from the F3 tornado. Numerous homes in the area were either destroyed or severely damaged. No lives in this community were lost due a tornado warning issued by the National Weather Service 30 minutes in advance and the Media's as well as public's quick reactions. In addition, tornadoes affected parts of northwest Austin, Texas between 410 and 515 pm, causing damage and numerous injuries.

An F4 tornado, with winds over 207 mph, claimed yet another life in western Travis county near the community of Lakeway. This tornado tracked towards the southwest for about 8 miles crossing Highway 71 south of Briarcliff. A tornado warning for Travis county had been issued at 409 pm. The Tornado first touched down near Siesta Shores Marina on Lake Travis at 445pm. This tornado destroyed some 15 homes and damaged 14 others. Throughout the early evening, tornadoes affected southwest Blanco county at 545 pm, near Utopia in Uvalde county at 7 pm, near Mountain Home in Kerr county at 703 pm, near Sisterdale in Kendall county at 730 pm, and funnel clouds were seen near Gonzales in Gonzales county at 810 pm. The last tornado of the evening occurred just northwest of the Pearsall airport in Frio county.

Damaging hail was reported as early as 355 pm at Georgetown. Scattered reports of hail continued to be observed in the late afternoon and into the evening hours over the Hill Country and South Central Texas. The largest hail, at nearly 4 inch in diameter (softball size), was reported with the tornado in Cedar Park. A 2.00 inch hail report was observed 8 miles east of Carta Valley in Val Verde County. around 4pm. Hail 1.75 inches in diameter fell in several places: at 26 miles south southwest of Rocksprings around 450 pm; at Driftwood (north of San Marcos) around 550 pm; and in Del Rio around 855 pm.

In addition to the damaging winds in tornadic thunderstorms, other severe thunderstorms produced some impressive straight line winds over the Hill Country, Central and South Central Texas. Winds gusts of 58 to 71 mph were reported in Austin, 71 mph at Austin Mueller Airport at 420 pm. In the San Antonio area winds gusted to 55 mph at International Airport at 815 pm, while at Kelly AFB, winds gusted to an incredible 122 mph, at 803 pm. At Randolph AFB, winds gusted to 36 mph at 820 pm. Strong wind was also observed throughout the Hill Country and other parts of central and south central Texas. Del Rio had a wind gust of 61 mph at 836 pm from the thunderstorms. At 640 pm, strong winds flipped a plane over at the Seguin Airport. The strongest wind at the New Braunfels Muni Airport was 51 mph at 627 pm.

Brief heavy rain that accompanied some of the thunderstorms caused flooding in Travis county, Blanco county, Gonzales county and a farm market road in Karnes county. One person was drowned by flood waters in Shoal Creek in Austin.

After the severe weather moved south and southeast of south central Texas, strong south and southeast winds followed from the outflow of the thunderstorms. Winds gusted to 30 to 40 mph from the south and southeast between 11 pm and 1 am.

The frequent vivid lightning with the storms was also seen in the wake of the storms, as they moved to the south and southeast.